



President's Message: There is no gift great enough for all you have done.

As I searched for inspiration among previous December messages, I found phrases such as “leave work behind, rest and regenerate”, “find joy in the things you love and chase your passions”, and “spend time in quiet reflection or in celebration with family and friends”. Many of these actions will be difficult, or look very different this year. What then, does one say to battle-hardened, trench-weary teachers, who more resemble tired soldiers preparing to be pulled off the line? What “gifts” will this new year bring in education, and what words can inspire the ability to press on?

I searched for appropriate humour, that your spirits may be lifted. According to helpguide.org; *“Laughter strengthens your immune system, boosts mood, diminishes pain, and protects you from the damaging effects of stress.”* Truly, I wish this gift for you, but how to do it, so as not to belittle the very real and difficult issues teaching in a pandemic brings with it. A carol such as “Expired PPE Roasting on an Open Fire” was a fleeting thought. May you share the gift of laughter this season.

How about the *“it will all be okay... one day”* approach? A major theme you noted in the ITA survey, was the ability to give your students the gift of grit and resiliency. In the MTS Life Speak Library ([LINK](#)) is a video module by Louis Jewell, titled *Building Resilience*. Jewell states: ***“The myth is that resilient people are able to go it alone and that they don’t need anybody’s help. On the contrary, research shows that the most resilient people are the ones who are always reaching out for help during tough times, and learning from failure rather than running from it.”*** No collective group exemplifies this more than teachers in 2020. Continue to use your voice. The MTS gift to us is tireless advocacy in the media and the pressing of government on the remaining tough issues.

My wish for you is this. It is for you to know that the greatest gift this season... **is you**. When you take all the rest away, what you have in the middle of all of it, is amazing teachers still providing connections for kids and communities. You as a whole self, a rested self, engaging as best you can under the current conditions in this crazy time in history. You are the one gift that keeps your students feeling safe and learning, in a real or virtual world. You have shared laughter and tears with your colleagues, and your resiliency has been a more powerful contagion than any virus. Interlake teachers’ gift of resiliency will leave a legacy, and is as bright as any candle or holiday star.

The conditions may be different, but winter break is upon us. I once again implore you to leave work and all things Covid behind, even if for a short while. Give yourself the gift of a break, and however you spend it, find peace, rest and new ways to enjoy the gifts of the season. Stay safe and be well.

“Just know you’re not alone, cause I’m going to make this place your home.”

From Phillip Phillips, ‘HOME’ – [LINK to song](#)

MTS Actions/Reactions on Key Issues: Click on a link below to read the key issues that MTS is focusing on when at the table with government. This and other Covid-19 items can be found on the [“Covid-19” page](#) on our ITA website www.interlaketeachers.ca, which has been recently updated. You can also read recent news articles on education, on our new [“In the News” page](#).

- [English Action/Reaction Document](#)
- [French Action/Reaction Document](#)

“USE YOUR VOICE” – Telephone Town Hall, Tuesday Nov. 24 - To listen in full, [click HERE](#).

MTS members had a chance to ask questions, share concerns and raise issues affecting their classrooms amid COVID-19 with President James Bedford and General Secretary Danielle Fullan Kolton. A total of 5,200 members connected province-wide to the telephone town hall and 251 questions from members were in the queue. At its peak, 2,175 teachers were listening to the town hall by phone while 1,687 others were tuned in to streaming audio on our website.

Bedford and Fullan Kolton said the town hall was a valuable initiative in that it was important to hear teachers’ voices. Bedford stressed that teachers’ stories “are incredibly important so the public and our politicians understand at a much deeper level the commitment that our members have.”

TEACHERS SPEAK OUT: The Manitoba Teachers’ Society has endeavoured to find out how its 16,000 members are viewing their current situations, from health to safety to recovery learning. This document ([LINK](#)) includes the main themes of their findings, including quotes from members.

TRAF UPDATE: Local Presidents attended a virtual TRAF update on November 26.

- 2020 experienced normal retirement activity. June saw less than normal actually, likely due to the global recession and members waiting until investments recovered. TRAF will watch 2021 numbers since 52% of teachers polled on the telephone town hall (~5,200 members took part in the town hall in some form), indicated they have considered retirement or a career change.
- 2020 return on TRAF investments was ~5%. The 20-year return is ~7.8%. **Note, members may make additional contributions to TRAF. Go to www.TRAF.mb.ca for information.**
- Did you know? For every \$100 you will receive in pension, you have contributed ~\$15, TRAF investing strategies/earnings ~\$35, and the Provincial Government \$50.
- Account A (our half) is 100.5% funded for current pensions; 86.8% for future pensions.
- What does this mean? We are not collecting quite enough to ensure all members can receive full pension, whenever that is in their future. We are approaching a point where the number of retired (receiving) members will overtake the number of active (contributing) members.
- After 2021, to keep Account A 100%-110% funded well into the future, TRAF will look into a possible rate increase, but are not overly concerned as markets recover.
- Account B (Prov. Gov half) is currently 57.2% funded. (The gov. portion is a “pay as you go” plan, so they will contribute their half as members retire; they just borrow it from other places in the budget). In 2001, Account B was 0% funded. Previous governments began a plan to fully fund Account B by 2035. TRAF predicts Account B will be at 0% again by 2052.

January remote learning for some, no break for others: - Break Plan Gets Failing Grade

Education Minister Kelvin Goertzen announced December 2, 2020, that the province will be mandating a two-week remote learning period for Grades 7 to 12 students, beginning January 4, 2021. Optional remote learning will be available to kindergarten to Grade 6 students during this period. A more detailed MTS response and more can be found by clicking the links below:

- [“Will Not Enhance Safety” – MTS](#)
- [MTS Calls for K-3 Mask Mandate](#)
- [Province Expands Rapid Testing for Teachers](#)



Be sure to update your My Profile to receive all MTS updates and emails. The Pembina Trails Teachers Association arbitration hearing will occur early in January 2021, and the recommendations from the K-12 Education Review are expected Spring of 2021 as well.

- [FAQs on Central Bargaining](#)
- [BILL 45](#)

SICK LEAVE:

- Sick days are used when members are sick. If you are sick and out of days, you can access Short Term Disability. Contact the MTS Disability Benefits Plan (DBP) at this [LINK](#) or call **(204) 957-5330 or 1-866-504-9373**.
- If members are directed to self-isolate by public health but are not sick, ISD will attempt accommodate members with meaningful work from isolation, or you may have to access EI if out of days. Speak to your Principal/Supervisor immediately upon receiving the self-isolation directive, and contact an MTS staff officer in the Teacher Welfare Department for help at **(204)888-7961 or 1-800-262-8803**.

***NEW – Mental Health and Well-being for Teachers:** The MTS site has consolidated resources and links for members at this [LINK](#). Below are some of the specific resources.

- **[Life Speak Wellness Platform - Looking for support, or information?](#)**

Life Speak experts can help you carve out some peace of mind in your world by giving you tips and strategies that are easy to implement, right now. Share this information with your loved ones or colleagues; we can all make a difference. **Go to the MTS Life Speak Library link [HERE](#).**

- **[The MTS Educator Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#)** services are there to help. The rules for the types of services you can access and still be covered under Blue Cross have changed to help members access help sooner and more often. Click [HERE](#) or call EAP for info.
- ISD Safety Advisor - Robyn Lowe shared this link to more government resources as well. www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/bewell/index.html

Contact: Send questions or concerns to Cathy at president@interlaketeachers.ca, or contact a **Teacher Welfare Staff Officer** at **(204)888-7961 or 1-800-262-8803**. Visit www.mbteach.org.

MTS DISCOUNTS: In this time of virtual retail and curbside pick-ups, don't forget about the MTS discounts you may use online. Click [HERE](#) for details. Self-gifting is not only ok, but also necessary.



The Manitoba Teachers' Society is now offering online professional learning opportunities to Members for free. This new service is intended to complement the regular program of PD events and activities offered by the Professional and French Language Services Department each year, and includes online sessions, workshops and interactive webinars. The purpose is to also provide greater access to professional learning to support the learning and development of Members. Follow this [LINK](#) to more details on the MTS site.

ITA gives the gift of learning, in memory of Christine Penner:

Grannies Gone Global is a charity that seeks to provide emotional and physical support to grandmothers locally and globally, who find themselves in the rewarding, but challenging position, of being caregivers of their grandchildren. The hope is that these grandmothers will be empowered to build capacity within their homes and promote sustainability within their communities. Christine Penner founded this grandmother support group in the fall of 2006 when she was vice-principal at St. John's High School in Winnipeg. Christine visited 459 homes of grade seven and eight students in an attempt to reach out to the community and to encourage parents/guardians to become real partners in advocating for their children in school. Throughout the home visits, Christine came across large numbers of grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren and started meeting with them over coffee. The St. John's Grandma Support Group was born. In 2010, as a consequence of their own growth in understanding that they were, but did not have to feel alone in their parenting, the grandmothers began fundraising for their African sisters. In 2011, the group grew into a registered charity, now known as Grannies Gone Global. They presently provide support for Grandmother groups in Winnipeg and Uganda. For more information please contact: granniesgoneglobal2018@gmail.com.

This year, as part of an endeavour to promote our organization to both members and the community, the Interlake Teachers' Association has donated \$500 to Grannies Gone Global in memory of our former Superintendent, Dr. Christine Penner. We have been able to support a young girl name Rebecca Harono. She is a daughter of one of the Uganda grannies and attends Old Kampala Senior Secondary School. Uganda plans to reopen schools virtually in January, and our donation will directly impact this young lady being able to return and complete her secondary school journey.

